

August 31, 2015

The Honorable Tom Wheeler
Chairman

Commissioners

Mignon Clyburn

Jessica Rosenworcel

Ajit Pai

Michael O'Reilly

Federal Communications Commission

445 12th Street, S.W.

Washington, DC 20554

**Re: *In the Matter of Lifeline and Link Up Reform and Modernization*, WC Docket No. 11-42,
Telecommunications Carriers Eligible for Universal Service Support, WC Docket No. 09-
197, *Connect America Fund*, WC Docket No. 10-90**

Dear Chairman Wheeler and Commissioners Clyburn, Rosenworcel, Pai and O'Reilly:

On behalf of Martin J Walsh, the Mayor of Boston, I write to offer Boston's strong support for the Federal Communication Commission's ("FCC" or "Commission") efforts to reform and modernize the Lifeline Program.

For thirty years, Lifeline has provided critical subsidies to ensure low-income Americans were connected with dial tone services and the benefits that these services made possible, such as 911 and community interaction. Yet, the last 20 years have seen a sea change in how Americans communicate. Today it is access to broadband and the services that broadband makes possible that impact nearly every aspect of our lives. Lifeline's mission must keep pace with the times. Lifeline presents an opportunity to ensure that low-income children and adults of all ages have access to affordable broadband and the services they support.

Accessing online resources is an economic hurdle. Many disenfranchised Bostonians and Americans, young and old, are denied access to the benefits of the Internet thereby harming their individual development and the competitiveness of the nation. As the Commission notes, 95% of U.S. households with incomes of \$150,000 or more are connected to the Internet, while only about 48 percent of the households making less than \$25,000 can afford to subscribe to home Internet access.

Boston pledges to work with the Commission to craft a Broadband Lifeline program that is as meaningful today as dial tone Lifeline was 30 years ago. We file in this proceeding to ask that the Commission note three categories that Boston has sought to address locally, but would welcome national leadership and resources. We will provide more detailed comments in the Commission's Reply cycle.

Elderly

Broadband access by the elderly is one area of particular concern in Boston, as Boston has a rapidly increasing population of elderly residents, the vast majority of whom (71.2%) have a household income less than \$50,000. The poverty rate for Boston's elderly is 21.4%. Elderly citizens are particularly unlikely to have internet access, and internet use can reduce the isolation and depression to which many of our elderly are vulnerable.

Understanding Access Alone is Not Enough

In Boston, we are proud to have multiple programs run by the organization Tech Goes Home which trains underserved community members of all ages on how they can use the Internet to improve their lives, whether to do schoolwork, find and apply for jobs, manage finances, or find city resources. 75% of program participants have household incomes under \$25,000, 90% are people of color, 40% are English learners, and 10% have significant disabilities. After completing fifteen hours of training, participants are given the option of purchasing a new computer for \$50 and they are assisted in signing up for low-cost Internet access. Over 15,000 community members have been trained over the last five years. Nearly 90% of participants continue to have internet access a year after their training.

Public Housing

The City of Boston is proud that it is one of the 27 cities selected to take part in the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's pilot of ConnectHome, which will connect 10,000 of our low-income households with broadband access for \$9.95 a month, in conjunction with training and educational opportunities. We hope the lessons we learn in Boston can serve as insights to the nation.

The opportunities that broadband internet access provides increase every day, and we must move forward on multiple fronts to address its availability, affordability, and utility to all citizens. The City of Boston stands ready to assist the Commission as it seeks to modernize the Lifeline program and expand broadband access to vulnerable populations. As we continue to recover from one of the largest economic crises in our country's history, shifting demographics demand a commitment to equity and opportunity. The imperative to invest in universal and affordable access to high-speed Internet connections has never been more critical.

Sincerely,



Jascha Franklin-Hodge
Chief Information Officer
Dept. of Innovation and Technology, Room 703
Boston City Hall
1 City Hall Square
Boston, MA 02201